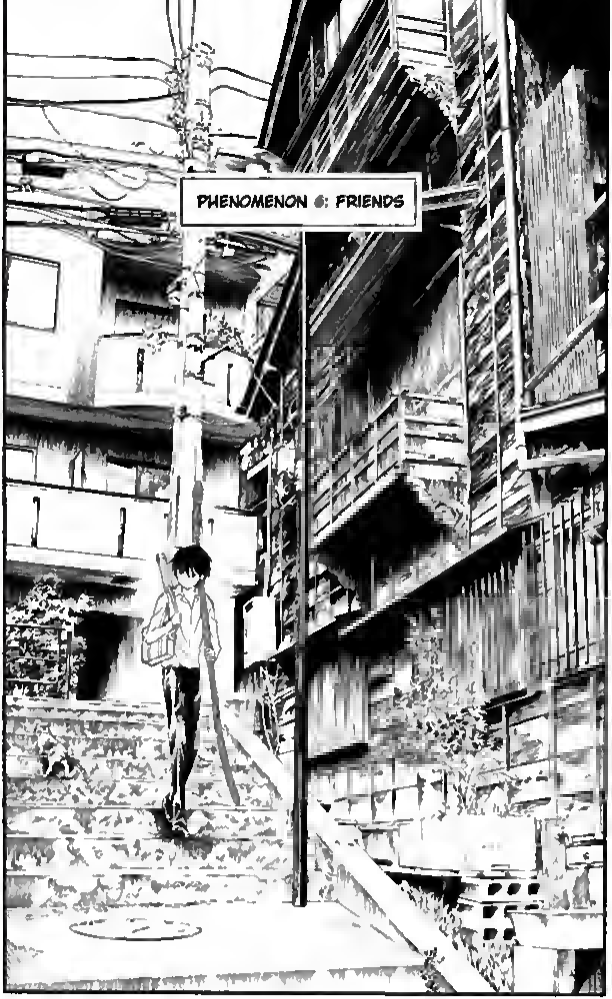

PHENOMENON 6: FRIENDS

すてい屋
すてい屋
OH.
I'M IN A TIP-TOP SHAPE TODAY, TOO!
Somehow!
ALRIGHT!

HM...?
IT'S GONE
FOR A SECOND THERE, I SMELLED...
SOMETHING SWEET
HMM, I WONDER WHAT IT WAS...
I'VE SMELLED SOMETHING LIKE IT BEFORE...
AT ANY RATE, IT SMELLED NICE AND SWEET..
2-C
AH!

GOOD MORN...

...OH?

AH!

YOU SMELL NICE!
UM...
AND SWEET!
...HUH?
...WHAT IS IT?
AH, WELL... UH...
WHAT IS IT?
WHAT'S WRONG, MISA?
WHA-
WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU?!
AHAHA.. THEY HAD THEIR FIRST TALK.
I'M SURPRISED UNTIL NOW, I HAVEN'T SEEN THEM TALK TO ONE ANOTHER.
AH, MISAKI-SAN... (I'D SAY SHE'S..)
NIKKI-CHAN SUDDENLY CALLED FOR MISAKI-SAN ...
...WELL, THAT WAS KINDA UNEXPECTED JUST NOW.

カリ
BUT WHEN YOU WRITE "NIKKI" IN KANJI, WOULDN'T IT BE "CINNA-MON"? SO, IF A GIRL USED IT AS A NICKNAME, WOULD THEY GAIN WEIGHT?
AHA... HUH? WEIGHT?
BUT "NIKKI" SOUNDS GIRLY, AND MAKES YOU THINK OF CINNA-MON, DOESN'T IT? THOUGH, I KINDA LIKE HOW IT REMINDS ME OF NIKKI TANOFSKY...
HUH? IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT, SAY SO—I TOOK ALL NIGHT TO COME UP WITH IT.

I DON'T LIKE MY NICKNAME, "NIKKI", EITHER...
I-I WAS... I DON'T LIKE THAT NICKNAME.
SO, PANDA-CHAN WAS SURPRISED TOO, HUH—?

I SEE, YOU MEANT THAT "NIKKI?" I THOUGHT YOU MEANT "NIKKI" AS IN "DIARY"...
DIARY?
YEAH.

—I SEE... IF YOU'RE HAPPY, I'M HAPPY.
YAY!
HEHE...

THANK YOU SO MUCH, PANDA-CHAN
SO I THOUGHT IT WAS A NICE NICKNAME!
YOU RECORD EVENTS IN DIARIES, SO YOU NEVER FORGET THEM, RIGHT?

IT'S A "FOX WINDOW (SIMPLIFIED VERSION)!"
OH YEAH, FROM WHAT YOU SAID EARLIER... HOW DID MISAKI-SAN SMELLED NICE?
AH, HOW INDEED? SHE SMELLED KINDA SWEET...
WAS IT PERFUME? SHE ACTS FEMININE EVEN IN CLASS
OR IT COULD'VE BEEN THE SMELL OF HER SHAMPOO OR SOMETHING...
HMM...
I'M NOT QUITE SURE THAT'S IT... SOMEHOW IT SEEMED...
DELICIOUS...
DELL... HUH?
ALRIGHT! WANNA SNEAK A QUICK PEAK?
? WHAT'S THAT?

AH, WELL,
IT WAS THE TRANSFER STUDENT
WHAT WAS THAT JUST NOW?
THE WEIRD GIRL WHO ACTS LIKE SHE'S THE HEROINE OF A MORNING SOAP OPERA.
OH YEAH, THE ONE WHO MAKES FADE... CRAINES... WHAT 'S HER NAME AGAIN?
HEY, MISA.
MISA!
...I DON'T KNOW!
OH...
YOU'RE NOT COMING OVER TODAY?
DO YOU HAVE ANOTHER JOB REQUEST?
NO... NOT TODAY... I'M MEETING UP WITH A FRIEND TO STUDY FOR OUR TEST.
I SEE
SORRY WILL YOU BE OKAY ON YOUR OWN?

HUH?
NIKKI-CHAN,
I'LL BE FINE I HAVE BOOKS I WANT TO READ,
AND GOLDFISH TO TAKE CARE OF
AH... OKAY COME TO THINK OF IT, DIDN'T KON-SAN SAY HE HAD FIELD-WORK..?
I'LL BE FINE I'M USED TO IT..
YOU'LL BE ALL ALONE UNTIL NIGHT-FALL..
BU.. BUT..
WHO'S THAT GIRL..?
She's my friend, Toono Akai-chan!
PLEASE EXCUSE ME.
I DIDN'T WANT TO INTRUDE, BUT IN THE END..

*TN: Kuzu jelly dumplings filled with sweet bean paste, usually served cold.

WELL, FOR THE TIME BEING, WE'LL START WITH THIS PAGE
OH.
WHERE'D HE COME FROM...?
HE'S THE YOUNGEST OF HIS SEVEN BROTH-ERS
HIS BROTHERS, YON* AND MUTSU*!
HE WORKS AT THE NEARBY CAT CAFE.
HE'S SUCH A HARD WORKER.
HE'S THE SHOP'S FAMOUS ATTRAC-TION
SHICHI-SAN?
WOAH! SHICHI*-SAN!
*TN: "Yon" means "four" and "mutsu" means "six" while "shichi" means "seven"
OF COURSE
THEY DO.
ANIMALS LIKE YOU, HUH?
AKAI-CHAN, YOU'RE AMAZING. HE WARMED UP TO YOU RIGHT AWAY.

AH! IT'S HERE, IT'S HERE!
HERE YOU GO! SORRY FOR THE WAIT!
SHE REALLY DOES HAVE FOX POWERS... WOOOW
DO YOU NEED ANYTHING?
SUMI-CHAAAN! CAN YOU GET SOME KUSA MOCHI—?
YEAH, YEA
THE BEAN PASTE HAS A SMOOTH, REFINED SWEETNESS TO IT
AWW, IT'S SO GOOD! IT'S DIFFERENT FROM THE CONVENIENCE STORE KIND
DEAR ME OF COURSE YOU CAN
I CAN EAT AS MUCH AS I WANT, RIGHT?
RIGHT?
I KNOW.
WHY ISN'T SHE COMING...?
!!
SUMI-CHAN?
SOMEHOW...
WHAT'S WRONG, SUKUIYA-SAN?
HM...

I FEEL LIKE I RECOGNIZE THIS SCENT...
HELLO—! WHOA, IT'S CROWED
NISHIKI...
MA'AAAM! I'LL HAVE SOME AZUKI* ICE CREAM.
HUH? IT'S SOUMA!
...AND KANO... JO-SAN.
KANO-SEMPAI IS NO MAN'S GIRLFRIEND. SHE'S MADE SURE OF IT!
KANOJO*? HAHA, SHE'S NOT MY GIRL-FRIEND
*TN: "Kanojo" can mean "girlfriend" in Japanese.
*TN: Ice cream mixed with azuki bean paste.

YOU'VE SAID HOW DISTRESSING IT IS TO WANT TO BE IN LOVE, RIGHT, SENPAI?
I, I HAVE?
YOU REMEMBER EXACTLY WHAT I SAY, DON'T YOU, KINO-KUN—
I'VE BEEN YOUR BIGGEST FAN FOR A YEAR!
I SEE—YOUR NAME MUST BE KANO...
AHAHA, NOT AT ALL! IT'S SHORT FOR MY LAST NAME, "KANOU!"
BUT THAT'S AN EASY MISTAKE TO MAKE! LET'S START OVER!
IT'S OKAY. EHEHE.
NIKKI-CHAN... DON'T SMILE...
It's too crowded Let's go, Souma
After all, we have somewhere else to be, don't we?
WHY ARE SO MANY OF MY CLASS-MATES HERE?
THAT'S IT, I'M LEAV-ING!
WE HAVE A STUDY SESSION PLANNED FOR TODAY, BUT WE STILL HAVE TIME FOR SNACKS.
HOW ABOUT YOU JOIN US?
AH, WE'RE GOOD, WE'RE GOOD. WE'D GET IN THE WAY

IS THAT...
MISAKI-...SAN?
HUH?
SUMI-CHAN! SUMI-CHAAAN! DO YOU HAVE A MINUTE?
.....
OH, IF THAT'S THE CASE, YOU CAN USE THE TATAMI ROOM.
IT'S A BIT MESSY, BUT I'LL HAVE IT STRAIGHTENED UP RIGHT AWAY
Huh? You're okay with that?

GEEZ, I NEVER THOUGHT PEOPLE FROM MY CLASS WOULD SEE ME WITHOUT MAKE-UP.
IT'S AMAZ-ING
WOW, SO THIS IS THE KITCHEN, HUH?
YEAH, YEAH, THIS WAY PLEASE. COME QUICKLY, OR YOUR HAIR WILL FALL INTO THE FOOD.
SIGH, GO AHEAD...

THAT'S THE SMELL
IT SMELLS SWEET...I SEE.
THIS IS A KITCHEN. ISN'T IT OBVIOUS?
WHAT?
SO, WHY AREN'T YOU WEARING MAKE-UP?

I DIDN'T WANT ANYONE TO KNOW THAT I WORK PART-TIME AT A JAPANESE SWEETS SHOP...
I THOUGHT I'D BE RIDICULED.
USUALLY, I ONLY WORK HERE IN THE MORNING... I SERIOUSLY DIDN'T WANT TO WORK NOW.
HUH? SO, YOU WORK HERE BEFORE YOU GO TO SCHOOL?
YEP.
I WANT TO HAVE FUN IN THE EVENING. I NEED MONEY TO DO THAT.
BUT, YOU WORK WITHOUT WEARING MAKE-UP RIGHT? AND THEN PUT IT ON AT SCHOOL...?
WELL, I FRANTICALLY PUT IT ON IN A PARK BATHROOM.
Chemicals
Chemicals
WHEN I CHANGE INTO MY UNIFORM, I SPRAY MYSELF TO GET RID OF THE SMELL OF AZUKI BEANS
I UNDERSTAND. I'M A GIRL, TOO...
I'D DIE IF EVERYONE SAW ME LIKE THAT.
KANO-SEMPAI, YOU'RE SO KIND!

—YOU FOUND OUT EASILY.

NONE OF MY FRIENDS HAVE FOUND OUT SO FAR, THOUGH...

I'M SO HAPPY. I SNIFFED OUT ONE OF SUMI-CHAN'S SECRETS!
HUH?
OH... YOU HAVE A GOOD SENSE OF SMELL... YOU HAVE THE MAKINGS OF A GREAT DETECTIVE, SUKUIYA-SAN.

EHEHE

AH! I'LL SHARE THEM WITH YOU!
FOUR DANGO* IS A LOT —SHARE HALF OF THEM WITH ME—
*TN. Dumplings made from mochi.
HEY SOUMA. SOUMA.
HER REASONING IS THE SAME AS KANO'S
STOP CALLING ME SUMI! CALL ME MISA! MISA AS IN "MISAKI!"
EVERYONE CALLS ME THAT!
THE STUDY SESSION'S GOING WELL...
I GUESS YOU COULD SAY...
SENPAI!
HEY SOUMA!
C'MON, PAY ATTENTION! YOU CALL ME MISA AT SCHOOL—
OKAY! I WILL, SUMI...! MISA-CHAN!
PLEASE COME AGAIN, EVERYONE
THANK YOU FOR HAVING US
BYE-BYE! SEE YOU LATER!

I'M GOING WITH THEM...
I'LL DROP THE KID OFF AT HER PLACE...AND WHILE I'M AT IT, I'LL DROP OFF NISHIKI AT HERS.
Sorry for the trouble!

YOUR APARTMENT IS DIRECTLY ACROSS THE STREET.
HUH—? SOUMA, WALK ME HOME, WALK ME HOME!
SENPAI, I'LL DO IT!

AH, OKAY.
LET'S GO, NISHIKI.

C'MON, PAY ATTENTION, PANDA.
BYE-BYE, SUMI-CHAN! SEE YOU TOMORROW AT SCHOOL!
IT'S MISA.

NISHIKI...
NISHIKI.
!...
If you kiss me, then I'll tell you where she is.

I CAN'T DO SOMETHING LIKE THIS AS EXCHANGE FOR SOMETHING ELSE...
..KANO
I CAN'T DO THIS...
—WHAT KIND OF RESPONSE IS THAT?
SINCE WHEN DO MEN TREAT ME LIKE THAT?
LIKE I THOUGHT IT CAN ONLY BE HER FAULT...

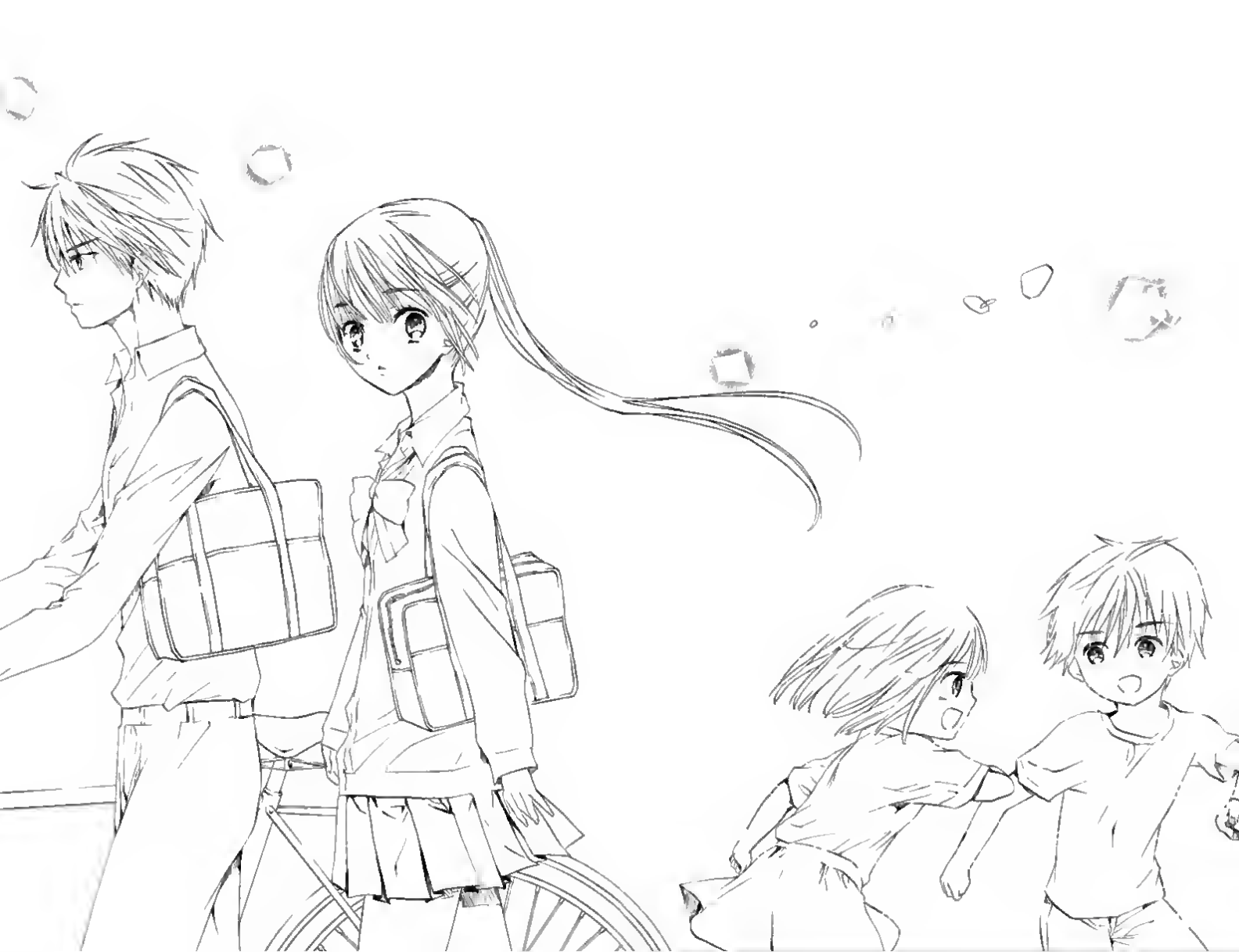
—ALRIGHT,
SHE'S GOING DOWN!
SUKUIYA-SAN
I'M NOT A CHILD ANY-MORE. I'LL BE FINE BY MYSELF
REALLY?? (BUT BY ALL APPEAR-ANCES, YOU ARE ONE).
I'LL COME OVER EARLY TOMORROW, OKAY?
WELL, WE'RE HERE
WILL YOU BE OKAY BY YOURSELF? SHOULD I COME IN FOR A BIT, AKAI-CHAN?

AH, THAT WAS FUN.
...YEAH.
SOUMA, DO YOU THINK-
HM?
I SHOULD KEEP A DIARY?

UP UNTIL NOW,
I WAS SCARED I'D LEAVE SOMETHING OUT IF I DID.
BUT..
TODAY, I GAINED THE NICKNAME "NIKKI-CHAN."
SO I THOUGHT... I REALLY SHOULD TRY TO KEEP ONE AGAIN.
BUT SINCE TODAY WAS SO FUN,
I THOUGHT I SHOULD REMEMBER IT
AH, WELL, BUT IS THAT DIFFERENT FROM STUDYING!? YOU HAVE TO RECORD STUFF DOWN, Y'KNOW?
BUT WELL, LIKE TODAY, IF YOU DON'T HAVE A NOTEBOOK, YOU CAN'T... HAHA

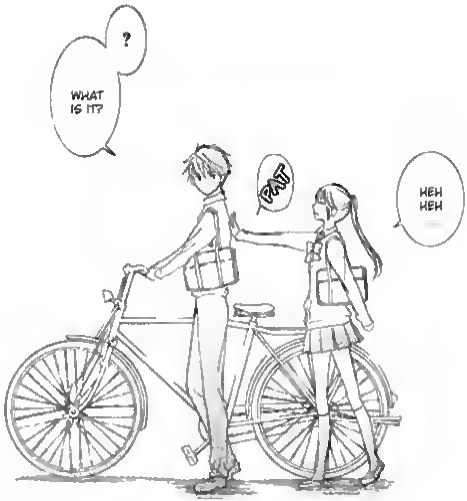
—I SEE.

SOUMA... I FEEL LIKE YOU SAY THAT A LOT
REALLY?
YEAH, YOU DO.
I SEE...
AHAHA, YOU DID IT AGAIN!
YOU HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN I SAY THAT?
NOPE...
WHEN I HEAR YOUR VOICE, I REMEMBER STUFF, LITTLE BY LITTLE
IT'S BIZARRE.



I SEE ..
Perhaps
They haven't sunk as deep as I thought.
Even if they've sunk into the depths of the dark, cold water,
Without making a sound yet again.
Memories have slipped through my fingers...
WHAT'S WRONG, NISHIKI?
I WAS ABOUT TO REMEMBER SOMETHING ELSE
SOMETHING .. IMPORTANT.
...I'M FINE.

I can almost touch him if I reach out...


?
WHAT IS IT?
PAT
HEH HEH

Kingyozaka Noboru

Chapter 6

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